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Updates

Mental support for health care professionals essential during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic continues and concerns regarding its consequences rise. This concern is addressed by other professionals (e.g. the use of a multidisciplinary approach¹ or the possible increase in suicidal behaviour).² However, the continuing huge pressure on mental health care professionals warrants the supporting of their mental health but regrettably, this topic received little attention.

In general, these unprecedented times will cause distress to individuals and leave many people vulnerable to mental health problems. Mental health consequences will be present for a long period and may peak later than the actual pandemic because people initially respond to the increase of pressure using survival mode but get exhausted after some weeks of continuous pressure. In 2002–2003 during the SARS epidemic, health care professionals experienced physical and mental symptoms,⁴ which makes the support of mental health of health care professionals key during this pandemic.³ So far, the limited attention for the mental health of health care professionals is astonishing. Others addressed important topics,^{1,2} but since it is uncertain when the COVID-19 pandemic ends, the workload for health care professionals will continue to be high. This applies for the hospital setting as well as mental health care setting, and other sectors. Furthermore, we expect a sudden increase of registrations as soon as the pandemic decreases (in the Netherlands) and therapy contacts will increase.^{5–8} Measures to prevent or support mental health of professionals in health care are limited, which is worrying because 25% of the general population reported decreased mental health during the pandemic.⁹

Some initiatives were developed to support the mental health of professionals in health care (e.g. World Health Organization).¹⁰ GGz Breburg and Amphia hospital developed a protocol based on previous findings³ and provided an outline on how to improve their mental health. This protocol¹¹ prevents incapacitation due to mental disorders using a

stepped care proposal consisting of: prevention of burnout, psychosocial support for experience anxiety related to the pandemic and offers a short-term post-traumatic stress disorder treatment. This protocol is made available upon request (please contact the corresponding author) and is just one possible way to support our health care professionals on which we rely so heavily but we would like to encourage the development of other mental support protocols. Mental support for the health care professional is necessary to prevent burnout and realize quick recovery when necessary, so more attention to this topic is pivotal.

Conflicts of interest

None declared.

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